

CHAPTER XXIII

INFLUENCING BY ARGUMENT

Common sense is the common sense of mankind. It is the product of common observation and experience. It is modest, plain, and unsophisticated. It sees with everybody's eyes, and hears with everybody's ears. It has no capricious distinctions, no perplexities, and no mysteries. It never equivocates, and never trifles. Its language is always intelligible. It is known by clearness of speech and singleness of purpose.

—GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE, *Public Speaking and Debate*.

The very name of logic is awesome to most young speakers, but so soon as they come to realize that its processes, even when most intricate, are merely technical statements of the truths enforced by common sense, it will lose its terrors. In fact, logic¹ is a fascinating subject, well worth the public speaker's study, for it explains the principles that govern the use of argument and proof.

Argumentation is the process of producing conviction by means of reasoning. Other ways of producing conviction there are, notably suggestion, as we have just shown, but no means is so high, so worthy of respect, as the adducing of sound reasons in support of a contention.

Since more than one side of a subject must be considered before we can claim to have deliberated upon it fairly, we ought to think of argumentation under two aspects: building up an argument, and tearing down an argument; that is, you must not only examine into the stability of your structure of argument so that it may both support the proposition you intend to prove and yet be so sound that it cannot be overthrown by opponents, but you must also be so keen to detect defects in argument that you will be able to demolish the weaker arguments of those who argue against you.

We can consider argumentation only generally, leaving minute and technical discussions to such excellent works as George P. Baker's "The

Principles of Argumentation,” and George Jacob Holyoake’s “Public Speaking and Debate.” Any good college rhetoric also will give help on the subject, especially the works of John Franklin Genung and Adams Sherman Hill. The student is urged to **familiarize himself** with at least one of these texts.

The following series of questions will, it is hoped, serve a triple purpose: that of suggesting the **forms of proof** together with the ways in which they may be used; that of helping the speaker to **test the strength** of his arguments; and that of enabling the speaker to **attack** his opponent’s arguments with **both keenness and justice**.

TESTING AN ARGUMENT

I. THE QUESTION UNDER DISCUSSION

1. *Is it clearly stated?*

(a) Do the terms of statement mean the same to each disputant? (For example, the meaning of the term “gentleman” may not be mutually agreed upon.)

(b) Is **confusion likely** to arise as to its purpose?

2. *Is it fairly stated?*

(a) Does it include **enough**?

(b) Does it include **too much**?

(c) Is it stated so as to contain a **trap**?

3. *Is it a **debatable** question?*

4. *What is the **pivotal point** in the whole question?*

5. *What are the subordinate points?*

II. THE EVIDENCE

1. *The witnesses as to facts*

(a) Is each witness **impartial**? What is his **relation** to the subject at issue?

(b) Is he **mentally competent**?

- (c) Is he morally **credible**?
- (d) Is he in a **position** to know the facts? Is he an **eye-witness**?
- (e) Is he a **willing** witness?
- (f) Is his testimony **contradicted**?
- (g) Is his testimony **corroborated**?
- (h) Is his testimony contrary to **well-known facts** or general principles?
- (i) Is it **probable**?

2. *The authorities cited as evidence*

- (a) Is the authority **well-recognized** as such?
- (b) What **constitutes** him an authority?
- (c) Is his interest in the case an **impartial** one?
- (d) Does he state his **opinion** positively and clearly?
- (e) Are the non-personal authorities cited (books, etc.) **reliable** and **unprejudiced**?

3. *The facts adduced as evidence*

- (a) Are they **sufficient in number** to constitute proof?
- (b) Are they **weighty** enough in character?
- (c) Are they in **harmony** with reason?
- (d) Are they mutually **harmonious** or **contradictory**?
- (e) Are they **admitted**, **doubted**, or **disputed**?

4. *The principles adduced as evidence*

- (a) Are they **axiomatic**?
- (b) Are they truths of **general experience**?
- (c) Are they truths of **special experience**?
- (d) Are they truths arrived at **by experiment**?
 Were such experiments **special** or **general**?
 Were the experiments **authoritative** and **conclusive**?

III. THE REASONING

1. *Inductions*

- Are the facts **numerous** enough to warrant accepting the
- (a) **generalization** as being **conclusive**?
 - (b) Do the facts agree **only** when considered in the light of this explanation as a conclusion?
 - (c) Have you **overlooked** any contradictory facts?
 - (d) Are the contradictory facts **sufficiently explained** when this inference is accepted as true?
 - (e) Are all contrary positions shown to be relatively **untenable**?
 - (f) Have you accepted mere opinions as facts?

2. *Deductions*

- (a) Is the law or general principle a **well-established one**?
- (b) Does the law or principle **clearly include** the fact you wish to deduce from it, or have you **strained** the inference?
- (c) Does the **importance** of the law or principle warrant so important an inference?
- (d) Can the deduction be shown to **prove too much**?

3. *Parallel cases*

- (a) Are the **cases parallel** at enough points to warrant an inference of similar cause or effect?
- (b) Are the cases parallel at the **vital point** at issue?
- (c) Has the parallelism been **strained**?
- (d) Are there no other parallels that would point to a **stronger** contrary conclusion?

4. *Inferences*

- (a) Are the **antecedent** conditions such as would make the allegation probable? (Character and opportunities of the accused, for example.)
- (b) Are the signs that point to the inference either **clear** or **numerous** enough to warrant its acceptance as fact?
- (c) Are the signs **cumulative**, and agreeable one with the other?

(d) Could the signs be made to point to a **contrary conclusion**?

5. Syllogisms

(a) Have any **steps been omitted** in the syllogisms? (Such as in a syllogism *in enthymeme*.) If so, test any such by filling out the syllogisms.

(b) Have you been **guilty** of stating a conclusion that really does not follow? (A *non sequitur*.)

(c) Can your syllogism be reduced to an **absurdity**? (*Reductio ad absurdum*.)

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Show why an unsupported assertion is not an argument.
2. Illustrate how an irrelevant fact may be made to seem to support an argument.
3. What inferences may justly be made from the following?

During the Boer War it was found that the average Englishman did not measure up to the standards of recruiting and the average soldier in the field manifested a low plane of vitality and endurance. Parliament, alarmed by the disastrous consequences, instituted an investigation. The commission appointed brought in a finding that alcoholic poisoning was the great cause of the national degeneracy. The investigations of the commission have been supplemented by investigations of scientific bodies and individual scientists, all arriving at the same conclusion. As a consequence, the British Government has placarded the streets of a hundred cities with billboards setting forth the destructive and degenerating nature of alcohol and appealing to the people in the name of the nation to desist from drinking alcoholic beverages. Under efforts directed by the Government the British Army is fast becoming an army of total abstainers.

The Governments of continental Europe followed the lead of the British Government. The French Government has placarded France with appeals to the people, attributing the decline of the birth rate and increase in the death rate to the widespread use of alcoholic beverages. The experience of the German Government has been the same. The German Emperor has clearly stated that leadership in war and in peace will be held by the nation that roots out alcohol. He has undertaken to eliminate even the drinking of beer, so far as possible, from the German Army and Navy.—
RICHMOND PEARSON HOBSON, *Before the U. S. Congress*.

4. Since the burden of proof lies on him who attacks a position, or argues for a change in affairs, how would his opponent be likely to conduct his own part of a debate?

5. Define (a) syllogism; (b) rebuttal; (c) “begging the question;” (d) premise; (e) rejoinder; (f) surrejoinder; (g) dilemma; (h) induction; (i) deduction; (j) *a priori*; (k) *a posteriori*; (l) inference.

6. Criticise this reasoning:

Men ought not to smoke tobacco, because to do so is contrary to best medical opinion. My physician has expressly condemned the practise, and is a medical authority in this country.

7. Criticise this reasoning:

Men ought not to swear profanely, because it is wrong. It is wrong for the reason that it is contrary to the Moral Law, and it is contrary to the Moral Law because it is contrary to the Scriptures. It is contrary to the Scriptures because it is contrary to the will of God, and we know it is contrary to God’s will because it is wrong.

8. Criticise this syllogism:

MAJOR PREMISE: All men who have no cares are happy.

MINOR PREMISE: Slovenly men are careless.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, slovenly men are happy.

9. Criticise the following major, or foundation, premises:

All is not gold that glitters.

All cold may be expelled by fire.

10. Criticise the following fallacy (*non sequitur*):

MAJOR PREMISE: All strong men admire strength.

MINOR PREMISE: This man is not strong.

CONCLUSION: Therefore this man does not admire strength.

11. Criticise these statements:

Sleep is beneficial on account of its soporific qualities.

Fiske's histories are authentic because they contain accurate accounts of American history, and we know that they are true accounts for otherwise they would not be contained in these authentic works.

12. What do you understand from the terms "reasoning from effect to cause" and "from cause to effect?" Give examples.

13. What principle did Richmond Pearson Hobson employ in the following?

What is the police power of the States? The police power of the Federal Government or the State—any sovereign State—has been defined. Take the definition given by Blackstone, which is:

The due regulation and domestic order of the Kingdom, whereby the inhabitants of a State, like members of a well-governed family, are bound to conform their general behavior to the rules of propriety, of neighborhood and good manners, and to be decent, industrious, and inoffensive in their respective stations.

Would this amendment interfere with any State carrying on the promotion of its domestic order? Or you can take the definition in another form, in which it is given by Mr. Tiedeman, when he says:

The object of government is to impose that degree of restraint upon human actions which is necessary to a uniform, reasonable enjoyment of private rights. The power of the government to impose this restraint is called the police power.

Judge Cooley says of the liquor traffic:

The business of manufacturing and selling liquor is one that affects the public interests in many ways and leads to many disorders. It has a tendency to increase pauperism and crime. It renders a large force of peace officers essential, and it adds to the expense of the courts and of nearly all branches of civil administration.

Justice Bradley, of the United States Supreme Court, says:

Licenses may be properly required in the pursuit of many professions and avocations, which require peculiar skill and training or supervision for the public welfare. The profession or avocation is open to all alike who will prepare themselves with the requisite qualifications or give the requisite security for preserving public order. This is in harmony with the general proposition that the ordinary pursuits of life, forming the greater per cent of the industrial pursuits, are and ought to be free

and open to all, subject only to such general regulations, applying equally to all, as the general good may demand.

All such regulations are entirely competent for the legislature to make and are in no sense an abridgment of the equal rights of citizens. But a license to do that which is odious and against common right is necessarily an outrage upon the equal rights of citizens.

14. What method did Jesus employ in the following:

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field; how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

15. Make five original syllogisms¹ on the following models:

MAJOR PREMISE: He who administers arsenic gives poison.

MINOR PREMISE: The prisoner administered arsenic to the victim.

CONCLUSION: Therefore the prisoner is a poisoner.

MAJOR PREMISE: All dogs are quadrupeds.

MINOR PREMISE: This animal is a biped.

CONCLUSION: Therefore this animal is not a dog.

16. Prepare either the positive or the negative side of the following question for debate: *The recall of judges should be adopted as a national principle.*

17. Is this question debatable? *Benedict Arnold was a gentleman.* Give reasons for your answer.

18. Criticise any street or dinner-table argument you have heard recently.

19. Test the reasoning of any of the speeches given in this volume.

20. Make a short speech arguing in favor of instruction in public speaking in the public evening schools.

21. (a) Clip a newspaper editorial in which the reasoning is weak. (b) Criticise it. (c) Correct it.

22. Make a list of three subjects for debate, selected from the monthly magazines.

23. Do the same from the newspapers.

24. Choosing your own question and side, prepare a brief suitable for a ten-minute debating argument. The following models of briefs may help you:

DEBATE

RESOLVED: *That armed intervention is not justifiable on the part of any nation to collect, in behalf of private individuals, financial claims against any American nation.*¹

BRIEF OF AFFIRMATIVE ARGUMENT

First speaker—Chafee

Armed intervention for collection of private claims from any American nation is not justifiable, for

1. *It is wrong in principle*, because

(a) It violates the fundamental principles of international law for a very slight cause

(b) It is contrary to the proper function of the State, and

(c) It is contrary to justice, since claims are exaggerated.

Second speaker—Hurley

2. *It is disastrous in its results*, because

(a) It incurs danger of grave international complications

- (b) It tends to increase the burden of debt in the South American republics
- (c) It encourages a waste of the world's capital, and
- (d) It disturbs peace and stability in South America.

Third speaker—Bruce

3. *It is unnecessary to collect in this way, because*

- (a) Peaceful methods have succeeded
- (b) If these should fail, claims should be settled by The Hague Tribunal
- (c) The fault has always been with European States when force has been used, and
- (d) In any case, force should not be used, for it counteracts the movement towards peace.

BRIEF OF NEGATIVE ARGUMENT

First speaker—Branch

Armed intervention for the collection of private financial claims against some American States is justifiable, for

1. *When other means of collection have failed, armed intervention against any nation is essentially proper, because*

- (a) Justice should always be secured
- (b) Non-enforcement of payment puts a premium on dishonesty
- (c) Intervention for this purpose is sanctioned by the best international authority
- (d) Danger of undue collection is slight and can be avoided entirely by submission of claims to The Hague Tribunal before intervening

Second speaker—Stone

2. *Armed intervention is necessary to secure justice in tropical America,*
for

- (a) The governments of this section constantly repudiate just debts
- (b) They insist that the final decision about claims shall rest with their own corrupt courts
- (c) They refuse to arbitrate sometimes.

Third speaker—Dennett

3. *Armed intervention is beneficial in its results,* because

- (a) It inspires responsibility
- (b) In administering custom houses it removes temptation to revolutions
- (c) It gives confidence to desirable capital.

Among others, the following books were used in the preparation of the arguments:

N. "The Monroe Doctrine," by T. B. Edgington. [Chapters 22–28](#).

"Digest of International Law," by J. B. Moore.

Report of Penfield of proceedings before Hague Tribunal in 1903.

"Statesman's Year Book" (for statistics).

A. Minister Drago's appeal to the United States, in Foreign Relations of United States, 1903.

President Roosevelt's Message, 1905, pp. 33-37.

And articles in the following magazines (among many others):

"Journal of Political Economy," December, 1906.

"Atlantic Monthly," October, 1906.

"North American Review," Vol. 183, p. 602.

All of these contain material valuable for both sides, except those marked "N" and "A," which are useful only for the negative and affirmative, respectively.

NOTE:—Practise in debating is most helpful to the public speaker, but if possible each debate should be under the supervision of some person whose word will be respected, so that the debaters might show regard for courtesy, accuracy, effective reasoning, and the necessity for careful preparation. The Appendix contains a list of questions for debate.

25. Are the following points well considered?

THE INHERITANCE TAX IS NOT A GOOD SOCIAL REFORM MEASURE

A. Does not strike at the root of the evil

1. *Fortunes not a menace in themselves*

A fortune of \$500,000 may be a greater social evil than one of \$500,000,000

2. *Danger of wealth depends on its wrong accumulation and use*

3. *Inheritance tax will not prevent rebates, monopoly, discrimination, bribery, etc.*

4. *Laws aimed at unjust accumulation and use of wealth furnish the true remedy.*

B. It would be evaded

1. *Low rates are evaded*

2. *Rate must be high to result in distribution of great fortunes.*

26. Class exercises: Mock Trial for (a) some serious political offense; (b) a burlesque offense.

¹ McCosh's *Logic* is a helpful volume, and not too technical for the beginner. A brief digest of logical principles as applied to public speaking is contained in *How to Attract and Hold an Audience*, by J. Berg Eaenwein.

¹ For those who would make a further study of the syllogism the following rules are given: 1. In a syllogism there should be only three terms. 2. Of these three only one can be the middle term. 3.

One premise must be affirmative. 4. The conclusion must be negative if either premise is negative. 5. To prove a negative, one of the premises must be negative.

Summary of Regulating Principles: 1. Terms which agree with the same thing agree with each other; and when only one of two terms agrees with a third term, the two terms disagree with each other. 2. “Whatever is affirmed of a class may be affirmed of all the members of that class,” and “Whatever is denied of a class may be denied of all the members of that class.”

¹ All the speakers were from Brown University. The affirmative briefs were used in debate with the Dartmouth College team, and the negative briefs were used in debate with the Williams College team. From *The Speaker*, by permission.